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ABSTRACT

North America and Europe are being transformed into a society of elders primarily due to improvements in medical technology and the reduction in the birth rate. Traditional life constructs are no longer valid. The futurist must begin to explore new systems which provide a viable synergistic relationship among education, work, and leisure. Educational leaders are exploring the concepts of lifelong learning and recurrent education. The primary goal is to break up the present age-segregated youth ghetto of education and create multidiversional systems infused with concepts of lifelong learning for all age groupings. Within the work sector, education should become a valuable adjunct, intermeshed with ongoing labor efforts. The future possibilities of this interchange make this option to adult learners a very attractive one. Finally, the concept of leisure is changing as our society is changing. It has value and importance for the self-explorational, creative side of human beings. It must be interwoven with education and work, while also maintaining its own sense of value with the growth of the individual and within the relationship of roles to the life cycle. (JH)

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A SOCIETY OF ELDERS: EDUCATION ONLY FOR THE OLD?

A paper presented to the Education Section
of the World Future Society

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The title of this paper should have alarmed you. Education only for the old -- how could our society exist without our traditional system of childhood/youth education! I have purposefully presented this caveat because I believe that the futurist must look at education from this vantage point, a perspective that has been ignored, discredited, or victimized by previous educational policy decision makers. Both within our society and from an international scope, education has selectively served the few in expense of the many. In earlier years education discriminated by socioeconomic status, racial category or religious heritage; now the chief remaining barrier is age.

Presently, American governmental and educational bureaucracies are focused on the knowledge industry of primary, secondary, and post-secondary education and on the "clientele group" of ages 4 to 26. The present system encompasses more than 3,000 colleges and universities serving over nine million students; 89,000 elementary and secondary school buildings serving almost 46 million students with a cost to taxpayers of over $75 billion a year. (12:140)

The adult of 18 years or older who does not wish to enter traditional educational programs finds that his/her learning experiences must be self-supporting, often dependent upon other group interests and upon institutional awareness to offer courses at times, places, and at a cost within

the range of student options. The adult learner also finds that he/she must actively seek out and preassessthose learning opportunities. Gaining access to non-institutionalized forms of learning requires commitment, perseverance, and ingenuity. For those adults who choose to access the traditional post-secondary systems, they often find age discrimination, biased admission standards, miniscule financial assistance, inconvenient class scheduling and an oblivious campus leadership oriented to 18-22 year old student behavior, attitudes, and expectations.

As Bob Dylan stated, "The times they are a changing." Educators are confronting the reality of diminishing youth population, the inadequacy of present education systems in serving adults and the new educational fraternity praising lifelong learning. However, there are many other forces both known and yet to be known that will radically alter the tapestry of education. In the next twenty years, the image of education will take on new forms and colors. The predominant new color strand will focus on the older adult and the new forms will redefine education, its role within the human life cycle and its interrelationship to work and leisure.

Will we become a society of elders?

North America and Western Europe are being transformed into a society of elders. These countries have seen a rapid increase in the percentage of aging population. As noted in Figure 1 (6:54), this rapid growth is occurring in advanced industrialized societies and has happened primarily due to improvements in medical technology and reduction in birth rates.

Two other striking examples of this change are pointed out in Figure

2 and Table 1. In Figure 2(4:35), age-sex population pyramids for the United States population display the redistribution of age groups in the last 70 years. Table 1 (6:55-56) presents an index of aging which compares people age 65 years and over with those under 15 and assesses the extent to which the population as a whole is aging. As noted by the index of aging, there has been a 300% gain over the last one hundred years. It has been estimated that by the year 2005, more than one-half of the United States population will be over forty years of age.

With these statistics, you must surely admit that we are no longer a youth society. Perhaps we may wish to remain young, but by actual years we are facing increasing longevity. Of greater significance, we must reconsider the educational priorities shaped by the baby boom of the 1940's and look to the development of human resources in the adult years. Because we are becoming a society of elders, the present model of education is each day moving closer to an anachronistic state. As Ernest Boyer eloquently points out:

> Historically, the span of human life has been chopped up into slices like a great salami, with each section having a special flavor all its own. First, there was the thin slice of early childhood--the time of happy play. Then came a thicker slice--twelve to twenty years, perhaps--devoted almost exclusively to full-time learning. Next, we had the still thicker chunk of full-time work. And finally, came retirement--the little nubbin at the end--characterized by some as "dignified decline." In this traditional life cycle of the past, the stages of existence were kept rigidly apart. (1:5)

This compartmentalized concept of man's life worked fairly well when we assumed education was only of value for the young; when in 1900 the average American work week was sixty-two hours, whereas today it's approximately thirty-seven; when one career per person was the accepted

norm as opposed to three to four career changes within our present lifetime by adult workers; and when people died at age sixty. Lastly, the concept of leisure in relation to work and education was an irrelevant issue in the 1900's. Today's leisure with its focus on the quality of life and of the human potential also raises new issues regarding the neatly packaged, but quite inappropriate model of life cycle roles. In our present and future, these traditional life constructs are no longer valid. The futurist must begin to explore new systems which provide a viable synergistic relationship between education, work, and leisure.

The Society of Elders and the Education Sector

Educational leaders from throughout the world are exploring the concepts of lifelong learning and recurrent education. The primary goal is to break up the present age-segregated, youth ghetto of education and create multi-dimensional systems, infused with concepts of lifelong learning for all age groupings. As noted in Patterns for Lifelong Learning (7:3),

> The changing nature of our society requires virtually all citizens to gain skills and intellectual orientations throughout their lives. Formal education of youth and young adults, once thought of as a vaccine that would prevent ignorance later in life, is now recognized as inadequate by itself to give people all the educational guidance they will need to last a lifetime.

These educators are evolving new delivery systems through satellite, consortia, telephone, television, computer and simulation. They are utilizing offices, warehouses, ships, trains and mountain retreats as locations. Subject matter, format, and teaching methodology are equally as diverse. (5) With these new efforts at nontraditional education,

three major issues face the educational sector in relation to the society of elders. The first issue is the defining of relevant learning experiences for adults. Lifelong learning is based on the premise that learning should not be compulsory nor content-dictated. Rather adults should voluntarily participate in defining of their learning experiences and learn through meaningful, active involvement. A national survey sponsored by the Commission on Non-Traditional Study (2) found that approximately 30 percent of the present adult population could be classified as learners; i.e., those presently involved in some form of educational activity. Another 46 percent of the survey population could be called "would-be learners"; i.e., those who are not currently participating in organized instruction but who expressed an interest in further learning. Of today's adult active learners, approximately 85 percent of this group have at least a high-school diploma. The best predictor of adults' participation in present forms of learning is their prior level of educational involvement. Through research, educational participation has been shown to be addictive. The greater positive participation in prior educational activities, the more the learner will participate in future available opportunities. Thus learning for the present adult learner is shaped by the positive reward of prior educational experiences and present relevant learning experiences which are perceived as accessible and beneficial. The "Would-be Learners" represent the potential clientele for immediate future restructuring of present educational formats. This group either has not located attractive and viable educational opportunities or, for them, education has been a mixed experience--with "costs" of involvement weighted more heavily

than benefits. Thus, present traditional and nontraditional systems are only effectively serving less than 1/3 of the adult population.

Of the adults in the "Non interest in learning" category (23%), the vast majority are people who are the disadvantaged, the functionally illiterate of our society. Within this country there is still an astonishingly high illiteracy rate. From the 1970 census (13) a total of 54 1/3 million persons of working age--16 years of age and over--were not enrolled in school and had not completed 12 years of education. The Adult Performance Level Project (5) found that 1 out of every 5 adults were functionally illiterate; they did not have basic coping skills for survival in our society. If we look to other nations and particularly to underdeveloped nations, the rate of adult illiteracy is staggering. In 1970, the African and Arab states had only one adult (over 15 years of age) in four who could read and write, while Asia hardly had more than half of the adult population as literate. In absolute figures in 1970, there were approximately 40 million illiterates in Latin America, 50 million in the Arab States, 143 million in Africa and more than 500 million in Asia. (8:39). This large group of adults do not have a relevant, effective educational system to teach them the basic skills. The challenge for the future is to develop viable processes and teaching strategies for these millions of people.

The third significant issue focuses on the adult as an independent, self-directed learner--developing, planning, and conducting his/her own learning activities outside the formal educational system. Allen Tough (14) in his research on independent learning projects has challenged beliefs about adult learning strategies. He documented that the typical adult conducts five learning projects a year, of which 70 percent are self

planned and do not rely solely on present educational systems to provide the focus and content. These five projects on the average encompass over 100 total hours a year and cover a broad range of content and skill development. This major finding suggests that educators may be most helpful in the role of a resource and facilitator to aid the adult in defining strategies and pursuing alternative learning experiences. The future of education may be shaped by the learning resource center concept as opposed to classrooms and guided learning experiences.

Society of Elders and the Work Sector

Education has traditionally been categorized as a prerequisite to work. This belief system has developed a "pipeline orientation" where 3 and 4 year olds enter the educational tunnel and do not come out until completion of a graduate degree at the age of 23 to 26. This pipeline mentality, the belief that more education equals better jobs, is extremely naive. In the present labor market, this mentality and belief also is creating a new set of societal problems for college educated adults.

O'Toole, Project Director for the Twenty Year Forecast Project, believes (11) that future-oriented educational policies require some notion of the environment in which people will be working. He stresses his concern for the "underemployed"--those who are highly qualified but unable to find jobs that require their skills and training. Today, about 80 percent of American college graduates fill jobs that were previously held by workers with lower educational credentials. This trend is also

apparent in Japan and other European countries. With this underemployment phenomena, there is also a continuing and rapid increase in educational attainment by American population, with a concomitant increasing desire for more education and better jobs, increasing expectation of work focus and life career orientation and evolving discriminating values regarding the quality of work life.

In the work market place, the future presents a disconcerting perspective of need for education. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that only about 20 percent of all jobs will require a college education for successful performance in 1980. Even more alarming, the Office of Management and Budget found that half of all jobs do not even require a high school education. (10)

O'Toole concludes that there is now and will continue to be a growing massive underemployment in the United States between supply of educated workers and the demand for workers with higher levels of educational attainment. It is possible that the social disparity between the promises of education and the realities of work will create problems of actual job dissatisfaction and of establishing a new meritocracy, one composed of the 20 percent of the population that will hold almost all of the good work positions.

This major concern for the "underemployed" or what some have termed as the "overeducated" points to an increasing problem with our tracking approach to education. Educational systems should not continue to pipeline children through a series of educational systems and expect job/work opportunities to match up with their educational accomplishments at the end of the line. With the high school years, there should be

interactive systems between the educational sector and the work sector. Colleges and universities, in particular, must quickly reassess their mission and impact upon young adults and their relationship to the labor market.

Within the work sector, education should become a valuable adjunct, intermeshed with ongoing labor efforts. Wirtz (16) suggests that there should be a new right, in the tradition of constitutional rights. This right would entitle every adult to five years of educational renewal opportunity to be used at various points, depending upon individual and societal circumstance. This entitlement would provide the support and resources for adult workers to seek out additional learning experiences within the larger society. In both France and Sweden, they have already established a work sabbatical. This sabbatical is provided by the matched funding of government and the private work sector for employees to gain additional schooling both in basic skills and continued work-development. These types of activities are also presently occurring in American industries which provide tuition-support programs and special training programs held at universities and institutes.

Besides creating structured opportunities to leave the work environment for learning, there are also significant opportunities to create educational learning systems within the workplace. A survey (16:151) in 1963 showed that about half the workers in the United States between twenty-two and sixty-four, including two out of five "managers and officials" and two out of three "operatives," had no formal occupational training. Surprisingly, 46 percent of craftsmen and foremen

reported no formal training. At present, few educational institutions have attempted to serve business and industry on their own territory. However, the needs for education and the future possibilities for this interchange make this option to adult learners a very attractive one.

For those adults who have difficulty entering the labor market, work and education take on a special significance. Unemployment is a serious misuse of human resources and a serious abuse to the human spirit. It impacts upon family life, societal services and individual beliefs about self worth and survival. Unemployment is closely interrelated with education. In today's society, there are decreasing opportunities for the unskilled and the illiterate to find employment. (13) Less than half of those adults in the United States with less than a high school diploma are presently in the labor force. More than 3 1/3 million of this same group are receiving public assistance. For those who do participate in the labor force with less than a high school education, they still have significantly higher rates of unemployment and higher proportion of part-time work than their counterparts with a high school diploma. Both business and education have not attempted to provide a system of basic literacy and job skills training for these large numbers of individuals. As our society continues its movement toward a more highly educated people, what will happen to an equally important segment of our society who are left behind unemployed and illiterate?

The last key issue within the work sector is the traditional concept of certification/licensure/apprenticeship for competency and its relation with future work and educational models. We are proliferating certification and licensure of occupations to the point that worker mobility is closely related to tested competence by a job classification group. This selective

tracking system in labor is also becoming as dysfunctional as the tracking system in education. More than 9 million people are presently working in occupations for which licenses are required in some jurisdictions. Most professional groups are endorsing recertification and relicensure through continuing education as an "easy way" to solve the concerns of continued competency in a profession.

As we become a credential-conscious society, there are growing problems with this form of access to jobs and job mobility. Cross (3) points to the threat of joyless learning where adults feel new pressures to gain and use educational credentials to compete in a tightening job market, and where compulsory and mandatory continuing education begin to encroach on issues of continued competency in the profession. Mariens (9) notes four major problems with credentialing and its use in the labor sector. These problems include: 1) artificial restraints on learning--diplomas, certificates are needed as entry passes for many education experiences; 2) overlooks obsolescence--being certified today does not guarantee competence through a lifetime; 3) generational inversion where the young, though less experienced, have higher credentials than their elders; and 4) the myths of a well-educated nation where although we are overcredentialed, we are not over educated. The credential in the labor force is becoming an abused process to validate skill competency, and for some, a farce lacking in substance.

A Society of Elders and the Leisure Sector

The third sector, leisure, also has significance to the life cycle of work and education. Leisure has often been perceived as the outlet for

pent-up energies or as a reward for a hard day's effort. Thus, leisure activities often were categorized as a special interlude in the midst of work; i.e., vacations, or as the reward for many years of work; i.e., retirement. Changing values regarding life satisfaction and self worth, the 40 hour or less work week, the status symbols of leisure, and growing concern for physical and emotional well-being have placed leisure into a dominant role within the life cycle. The concept of leisure now focuses on 1) the quality of life, 2) the role of retirement, 3) the pursuit of human satisfaction or happiness, and 4) the integration of the instrumental and expressive sides of the human condition; i.e., providing outlets for the continuing exploration of self-expression in a relaxing, non-restrictive or non-evaluative fashion.

Havighurst (5) speaks to the development of a "leisure ethic". With a more affluent society and less time required for life survival activities, leisure will take on a prominent life commitment, just as the Protestant work ethic has been part of our lives. At present, leisure is a valued phenomena of the middle and upper class. It often is an elusive, but highly promoted, state of existence for this group. In many respects, people "work" just as hard at their leisure as they do at their jobs. Unless the concept of leisure has been placed within the realm of something which is valued by society, adults believe they are guilty of laziness and immaturity. Outside of a work or educational perspective adults have been unable to define a value life-space in their daily lives for leisure. Nor have most adults developed the attitudes and skills to create and enjoy leisure activities.

Leisure has also taken on a new perspective with the growing numbers of people who face mandatory retirement and therefore, mandatory leisure time. Current statistics note a shocking suicide rate among men within the first three years after retirement. Instead of overindulging in relaxation and leisure, individuals with more unstructured time than they expect, may actually withdraw into a minimum level of participation. Loss of work role, its related loss of external communication regarding the value and worth of the individual, and the imposed void of external involvements and routine make retirement a shift of the life cycle filled with stress and self-deprecation. Adjustment to retirement is largely related to the person's prior attitudes and involvements with leisure and the ability/skill to self structure personal time. For some, when free time appears, they have no ideas as to what to do with it. Some purposefully avoid free time by filling it up with work and family obligations. Others seek out leisure and educational opportunities only to find programs that are patronizing and simplistic in scope.

In a society of elders, leisure must be implanted from youth through adulthood in the same soil as education and work. As previously pointed out in the educational and work sectors, leisure in one large segment, one track at one point in life, is not appropriate for adults. Leisure has value and importance for the self-explorational, creative side of human beings. It must be interwoven with education and work, while also maintaining its own sense of value within the growth of the individual and within the interrelationship of roles to the life cycle. Certain business firms have begun to promote avocational and physical fitness classes within the work environment. Educational institutions

are also creating opportunities for leisure experiences. However, there is no holistic model which incorporates leisure concepts into a continuous, integrated system of life cycle development.

Mandate to Education Futurists

As we become a society of elders, the weaving of the tapestry of future education will be a most difficult and complex undertaking. This tapestry will feature both the familiar and the unfamiliar forms. It will have the core holistic structure focused on mankind from birth through death. It will highlight learning activities relevant for all ages and for a variety of program delivery systems. In looking at this tapestry of future education, we will be astounded by the multiplicity of models and forms--all representing life stage development of the individual with interwoven nuances of education, work, and leisure.

This tapestry is still being woven, but as with any artistic effort, there must be a master plan to direct individual energies. From reflections on the current state of education, work, and leisure, certain elements should be represented within this master plan. These elements will include:

1. An ease of access and exit within each short-term cycle of work, leisure, and education.

2. The primacy of the adult learner and the relevance of participatory, meaningful learning experiences.

3. Voluntary (as opposed to compulsory) involvement, with minimal precursors or prerequisites.

4. No differentiation (nor segregation) by age or institutional territoriality.

5. Significant collaborative interchanges between the sectors of education, work, and leisure.

6. Equal allocation of societal resources to the varied forms and structures.

7. Linkage of learning strategies, work, and leisure skills throughout the entire life cycle of the individual.

As to the final appearance of the tapestry, we still must predict and fantasize the finished appearance. However, we do know that this tapestry will look far different from the current scene of education. It will focus the attention of the eye towards the society of elders and education for the old.

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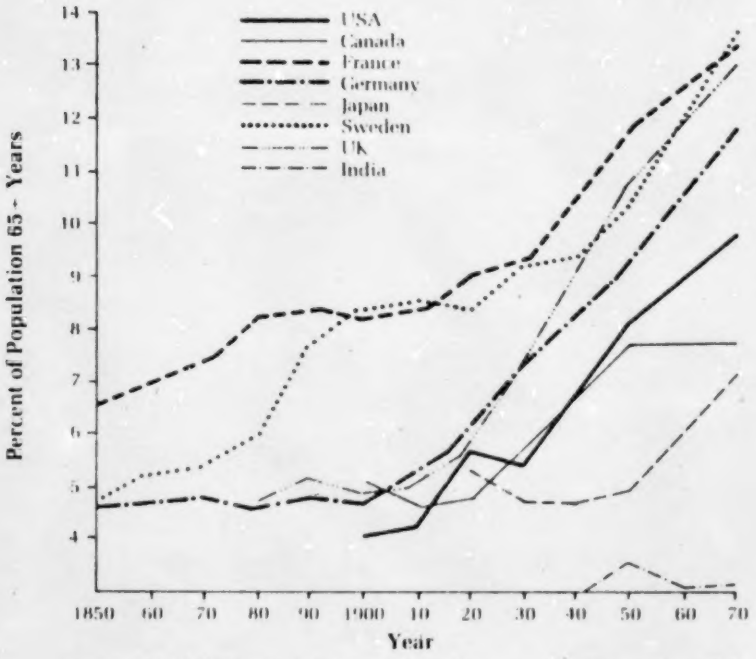
Figure 1

Percentage of the population aged 65 and over for selected countries



Sources: United Nations. *The Aging of Populations and Its Economic and Social Implications*. Population Studies, no. 26 (New York: United Nations, 1956). United Nations. *Demographic Yearbook, 1973*. 25th ed. (New York: United Nations, 1974). (Adapted from numeric data)

Table 1

Percentage Distribution of Three Age Groups in the United States, 1880–1970, Index of Aging and Dependency Ratio

YEAR	14 YEARS OR UNDER	15–64 YEARS	65 YEARS AND OVER	INDEX OF AGING[1]	DEPENDENCY RATIO[2]
1970	28.5	61.7	9.8	34.4	62.1
1960	31.0	59.8	9.2	29.7	67.2
1950	26.8	65.3	8.2	30.6	53.5
1940	25.0	68.1	6.8	27.2	46.6
1930	29.3	65.1	5.4	18.4	53.3
1920	31.7	63.4	4.7	14.8	57.4
1910	32.1	63.4	4.3	13.4	57.4
1900	34.4	61.3	3.1	11.9	62.8
1890	35.5	60.4	3.9	11.0	65.2
1880	38.1	58.5	3.4	8.9	70.9

[1]Index of Aging = $\frac{\text{Population 65 years +}}{\text{Population 0–14 years}} \times 100$

[2]Dependency Ratio = $\frac{\text{Population aged 0–14 and 65 years +}}{\text{Population 15–64 years}} \times 100$

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Census. Census of the Population: 1970. Vol. 1, *Characteristics of the Population*, pt. 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973); W. Petersen, *Population*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1969), p. 68. (Composite data)

Figure 2 (A) (B) (C)

Age-sex population pyramids for the United States: 1900, 1940, 1970. (United States Bureau of the Census. Census of Population: Characteristics of the Population. 1940, 1970)